

Becker-Franz Store and Addition
Clifton Townsite
169 Frisco Street
Clifton
Greenlee County
Arizona

HABS No. AZ-171

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PHOTOGRAPHS
WRITTEN HISTORICAL AND DESCRIPTIVE DATA

Historic American Buildings Survey
National Park Service
Western Region
Department of the Interior
San Francisco, California 94107

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HISTORIC AMERICAN BUILDINGS SURVEY

BECKER-FRANZ STORE AND ADDITION

HABS No. AZ-171

Location:

Clifton Townsite, 169 Frisco Street, Clifton, Greenlee County, Arizona

Significance:

Associated with commercial development of Clifton, and with development of the North Clifton neighborhood. An example of typical Panel-Brick Commercial style architecture in Clifton.

Description:

The Becker-Franz Store is a commercial-style building. The brick building has a sandstone foundation that is exposed. The roof is flat with a Neo-classical detailed front parapet. The exterior finish of the building is stucco. The recessed entry features wooden single-light doors with flanking sidelights and a transom above. Two windows flank the entry. Each has a four-light upper sash and a single-light lower sash. A grand concrete stair and ramp leads to the entrance. A corrugated metal addition has been made to the rear and another to the south side of the building.

History:

This brick building was constructed in 1907 by the Becker-Franz Co. for use as their general store after an earlier adobe building they were leasing at the same site was destroyed by the 1906 flood. Although delayed by a shortage of material, contractor W.A. Pitt noted the building was nearing completion in April of 1907. Pitt constructed the building on a high foundation as protection against flood water. The Becker-Franz Co. moved into the completed building the during the first week of June.¹

Although the A.C. Company refused to allow any commercial enterprises within company owned land in Clifton that might compete with the Company store, individuals were free to establish such activities in the private lands outside the Company line. In February of 1901, the Becker-Franz Co. purchased the general merchandise establishment of W.F. Hagan in North Clifton, who expressed a desire to devote his time to his real estate and mining ventures. Ernst H. Franz, formerly associated with Becker in a general store in Luna, New Mexico, and Gustav Becker, a prominent merchant and stockman of Springerville, Arizona, operated several general stores in early Arizona and New Mexico communities. Becker and Franz, along with Sonora City, New Mexico, merchant John S. McTavish, incorporated the Becker-Franz Co. in April of 1903. The firm leased the lots and adobe buildings in North Clifton from Hagan for fifty-five dollars a month and opened a second branch in the McFate building in South Clifton which they leased for \$3000 a year from J. N. McFate. This second lease proved too expensive and in July of 1903 the Becker-Franz Co. sold its stock and lease to the Shannon Copper Co. which wished to establish its own company store.²

The Becker Franz Co. operated stores in several Arizona and New Mexico communities, including Springerville, Solomonville, Lordsburg, Globe, and Miami. An observer in 1911 noted that the firm was "one of the largest commercial institutions of the Southwest." Gustav Becker was an absentee

partner in the operation and spent most of his time tending to the Becker Franz Co. store in Springerville. Ernst H. (Dick) Franz remained a Clifton resident and managed the daily operations of the Clifton branch. Franz had a reputation as "an old time Republican and thorough businessman." He served his party in several political posts, including deputy US Marshal. Most members of the business community in Clifton were staunch Republicans, and found that they made little headway when running for office as most of the voters in Greenlee County were working men and Democrats. Even so, Franz donated 100 sacks of flour to the striking miners during the 1915-1916 strike. In addition to Clifton residents, the Becker Franz Co. store catered to cattlemen north of Clifton. In 1922 Franz fought a tough contest for Sheriff of Greenlee county against Democratic opponent W.T. Witt. Franz lost, and local residents trace his desire to leave Clifton to this disappointment.³

However, it may be that financial considerations played a greater role in the decision of Dick Franz to leave Clifton. As an heir to the fortune of Elkhart D. Franz, a St. Louis merchant who died in 1898, Dick Franz had managed to acquire California ranch property by February of 1922. With the Clifton economy sour in the wake of the slump following World War I, Becker Franz Co. sold out to William Leslie and J. E. Phillips. These gentlemen found the going rough as well and in 1927 the property was acquired at a Sheriff's sale for back taxes by W. F. Hagan. By this time Gustav Becker had been killed in an automobile accident and Dick Franz retired to Pasadena, California. In the Depression years the store building was leased by Hagan to Paul Aguilar. In recent years the building saw use as the Graham-Greenlee Community Center.⁴

Sources (endnotes):

1. Copper Era December 6, 1906 (I, 1: 1-6); April 4, 1907 (I, 3: 1); May 16, 1907 (I, 2: 1); and June 13, 1907 (I, 3: 1).
2. Copper Era February 28, 1901 (I, 3: 3); April 2, 1903 (I, 3: 1); April 30, 1903 (I, 3: 4); May 14, 1903 (I, 4: 2); May 21, 1903 (I, 4: 4); July 30, 1903 (I, 3: 1); and August 27, 1903 (I, 3: 5). Hagen did not stay out of the merchandise business long, in February of 1902 he started construction of his own business block in North Clifton. See the Copper Era February 2, 1902 (I, 3: 1).
3. Copper Era January 17, 1908 (I, 2: 1); October 15, 1908 (I, 3: 1); March 17, 1911 (I, 3: 2); May 19, 1911 (I, 3: 1); May 9, 1913 (I, 1: 3); October 15, 1920 (I, 5: 1); November 10, 1922 (I, 1: 1); interview with Al Fernandez, December 16, 1993.
4. Copper Era February 17, 1922 (I, 4: 1); December 17, 1927 (I, 1: 4); August 18, 1928 (I, 5: 1); March 2, 1929 (I, 1: 1); interview with Al Fernandez, December 16, 1993.

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September, 1994